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Statement submitted by Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2014/1/Rev.1, annex II.

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Statement

The Millennium Development Goals are a very ambitious initiative that has succeeded in some parts of the world while failing in others. Different strategies and actions have been applied in order to address the Goals. The most pressing development issues are clearly targeted by the development agenda: from poverty reduction, health, employment and education to human rights, sustainable development, finance and effective governance. All of them are very important, but there are specific cross-cutting issues that, if dealt with successfully, may generate a positive impact on all of them.

Combination of Goal 2 and Goal 3: gender equality through education

It is without question that education immediately affects the other development goals and that it is an integral part of all the efforts to eradicate poverty; it also generates a domino effect on solving the majority of the problems occurring in every country, in particular developing ones. It is undeniable that rigorous education of all citizens in a nation significantly empowers people and contributes to the development of a nation on a sustainable basis.

Education is the main vehicle for social justice and it is our common responsibility to ensure that all children are in school regardless of their situation and to act urgently to provide access to quality education for all children.

Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi (The Journalists and Writers Foundation) believes that the political, economic and legal regulations for development cannot have a lasting effect if the people are not educated on universally accepted values such as human dignity, equality of opportunities and peaceful coexistence. The organization endorses schools that focus on two main areas: high-quality education and social responsibility. The success of this education model was tested initially in Turkey and some newly independent Central Asian countries. In 1995, when the war in Bosnia was going on, the organization undertook a fundraising campaign to establish this model in war-stricken Bosnia.

As education is undeniably the main vehicle for sustainable development and peace, it is very important to highlight the gender perspective in education. The organization believes that the promotion of the participation, visibility and empowerment of all girls through the creation of safe spaces for them to speak and to obtain assistance is very important for sustainable development.

Both men and women suffer from gender stereotypes. Negative stereotypes have negative impacts on men and women. Gender is relational and both issues are consequential for development. Experience has demonstrated that interventions directed at women are not always effective if there is a lack of men's cooperation. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness of the need to have a more comprehensive, male-inclusive gender equality paradigm.

An overall cultural sensitivity maintained in the school is a main factor behind the decision of parents on whether to send their daughters to school or not. For example, in countries such as Afghanistan, some people from conservative circles send their daughters to school only if they trust the school.

To highlight one among many examples of schools in populations with a conservative majority, we want to take a closer look at the Afghan-Turkish schools.

The persistence of the Afghan-Turkish schools in continuing to offer education to girls when the security circumstances in Afghanistan were not conducive is a clear sign of commitment to the importance of girls' education. It is a demonstration of how non-State actors can contribute a lot to achieving the goal of respecting everybody's basic human rights such as education.

The report by Afghanistan submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women concerning the situation in Afghanistan (CEDAW/C/AFG/1-2) points to the fact that the anti-governmental insurgents are against women's education and have closed girls' schools. Our organization wants to demand civil societies' responsibility in this issue.

Unfortunately, one must admit that de facto the situation in Afghanistan does not ensure equal opportunities for girls' education. In cases like this, when the official structures of the State and the international community are unable to provide the basic human rights of education to everybody, civil society organizations can step in. The successful story of the Afghan-Turkish schools can be portrayed as a role model of how civil society organizations can manage to solve grave societal problems that were thought to be unsolvable by the State and the international community alike. The example of the Afghan-Turkish schools provides an important alternative way of thinking about the role of civil society in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

In line with this approach, the organization sponsored a sociological research project, entitled "Afghan-Turkish private schools and their impact on girls' education in Afghanistan", which includes an analysis of the socioeconomic background of the girls attending these schools, their prospects for contributing to the present and future of their countries and, basically, how these schools emerged in and survived through the harshest conditions created by internal and external conflicts in recent decades.

On the basis of the results of this study, one can admit: "It takes more than textbooks and pencils to be a schoolgirl in Afghanistan — it also takes tremendous bravery and tenacity". In these schools, the principle of non-discrimination was not abandoned even in times of great insecurity. The Taliban rebels posed a great danger for the girls who wished to go to school and for their families as well. Girls were harassed, hurt and even killed on their way to school. Likewise, there was great pressure on the schools to stop accepting girls. By opposing the will of the Taliban leaders, the managers of these schools demonstrated their commitment to tolerance and their opposition to discrimination against students on any kind of basis, including on the basis of sex. Therefore, these schools stand firmly on the side of protecting human rights generally and girls' right to education specifically.

The organization believes that the successful story of the Afghan-Turkish schools is meant to create a role model that could be used in countries with problems similar to those of Afghanistan. Promoting human rights — girls' right to education, in this specific case — is not a task for State officials only. Civil society organizations can and should take a more active role. The organization believes that a combination of top-down (State) and bottom-up approaches that build a partnership among the United Nations, Governments and civil society is crucial for sustainable development.